

# *News Advisory*

From the Rhode Island Judiciary



## **Court seeks additional volunteer attorneys as assistance program extended in eviction cases**

**February 9, 2021:** The Rhode Island District Court is extending its highly successful volunteer attorney program begun last summer to assist the court in the adjudication of tenancy and eviction cases during the COVID-19 pandemic, Chief Judge Jeanne E. LaFazia announced. More volunteers are being sought.

In anticipation of the expiration of certain pandemic-related benefits and assistance, the program provides tenants facing eviction with legal advice at the courthouse in negotiating payment plans, move-out dates, or other tenancy matters just prior to their District Court hearings.

“Our volunteer attorneys have done a great job; it has been a tremendous success,” said Chief Judge LaFazia. “I am so grateful for their participation and I hope they will continue to come forward.”

The federal government has extended until at least March 31 its temporary halt to residential evictions for nonpayment of rent to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Evictions continue to be heard in District Court, but the enforcement of eviction orders has been on hold.

While many landlords have an attorney, the vast majority of tenants facing eviction are not represented by a lawyer, which was true even before the pandemic, Chief Judge LaFazia said.

The volunteer attorneys serve as “friends of the court” to advise tenants of their rights, describe the process, and provide free advice just before their hearings begin. Under this format, the volunteer lawyers assist numerous tenants during a half-day shift at the courthouse.

The volunteer attorneys receive training in landlord/tenant processes and earn mandatory continuing legal education credits, which are required annually of all active attorneys. Credits earned this year can be applied toward the requirements for 2022. As of December, more than 60 attorneys had volunteered their time for the program. Volunteers may contact the District Court judicial officer assigned to the tenancy and eviction calendar in their respective counties for more information.

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